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AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED IN HANOVER, N. H.

BEFORE THE

DARTMOUTH MEDICAL SOCIETY,

ON THEIR FIRST ANNIVERSARY,

Dec. 28th, 1819.

BY EBENEZER ALDEN, M. D.

HONORARY MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JAMES LORING, NO. 2, CORNHILL.



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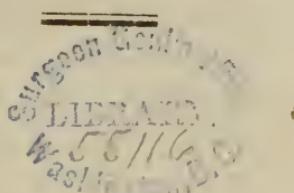
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16A.

IN yielding to the solicitations of the Society, before whom the following address was delivered, to submit a copy for the press, the author regrets, that in the short period allotted for its preparation, he was unable to render it more worthy of their notice. He indulges the hope, that it may be read with the same candour with which it was heard, and will be gratified, should its publication be instrumental in promoting the important objects of their association.

Randolph, (Mass.) Jan. 10, 1820.

ADDRESS, &c.

NEARLY allied to the emotions experienced on visiting the scenes of infancy and early childhood, are those which we feel, when, after a long absence, we are permitted to re-enter those consecrated bowers, where we have been instructed in the first principles of academical and professional science. Every object we behold reminds us of that interesting period, when, undisturbed with the perplexities of active life, our minds were filled with the most pleasing anticipations. The world appeared attractive as the garden of *Eden*; and whatever was then wanting to consummate our felicity, we fondly imagined would be supplied, whenever, released from our confinement, we should be permitted to approach, and taste its delightful fruits. Alas, too soon we found our expectations were but airy dreams; that every human pleasure has its alloy;—that disappointment is so common as to occasion no surprise; and that the happiness of the present world, at best, is but partial and incomplete. Still we love to linger about these fairy regions; and, when we meet with our former associates, to revert to those halcyon days which will no more return;—to hear a recital of events which have since transpired; to learn the success which has crowned the exertions of riper years, and to listen to the deductions of a larger experience, and more matured judgment. These feelings, in a measure common to all who have been associated in similar pursuits, exist in a high degree, among the members of the medical faculty; who, from the nature of their employ-

ments, are seldom indulged with the privilege of leaving the narrow sphere of their professional labours, to enjoy the luxury of social intercourse with their former friends and companions.

Permit me, gentlemen, in this connexion, to congratulate you on the flourishing state of the medical institution in this place; and especially, on the recent formation of a society from among its members, eminently calculated not only to be useful during the period of preparatory education, but annually to enkindle some of the best feelings of the heart; and to strengthen that bond of union, which ought ever to exist among brethren of the same profession.

Although fully aware that your honours might in one instance have been more advantageously conferred, yet grateful for the privilege of being admitted a member of your respected society, and unwilling to withhold any effort, however feeble, which may have the most remote tendency to promote its interests; I have ventured, in compliance with your request, to appear before you on the present interesting occasion. Allow me to hope for your candour, while I attempt to suggest a few thoughts on some of those leading qualifications which confer respectability on the medical practitioner.

The highest point of professional eminence can be attained but by few of the numerous competitors who aspire to it. Uncommon natural talents, the influence of powerful names, and many fortuitous circumstances, are absolutely necessary to insure it. Nor when critically examined, is it an object so much to be desired, as, at the first view, we are disposed to imagine. It resembles the summit of some lofty mountain, which at a distance presents to the traveller a most inviting prospect; but which seems to recede as he advances: and if after great labor he is able to gain its steep and rugged ascent, the glittering surface which so beautifully reflected the sun beams, proves to be “a dreary pile of naked” barren “rocks.” It is in the fertile plains which spread beneath him, which

he had passed almost unnoticed, that he would choose to establish his permanent residence.

In the profession of medicine, a bold adventurer occasionally attains a momentary elevation, by publishing an extravagant theory of diseases, or some infallible catholicon; newspapers and journals lend him their ephemeral assistance; he receives one blast from the trump of fame; and his name, and his discoveries, sink into everlasting oblivion. But, it is the calm and patient observer of nature; to him, who, while he freely communicates his knowledge, is himself willing to be taught; to him, who, above every other consideration, strives to be useful; that our art is indebted for its principal improvements. If he moves in a track less brilliant than the former, the light which attends it is more clear and permanent, and the course less liable to variations and obliquities.

Respectability, if not eminence, in his profession, is attainable by every individual of ordinary capacity, who will adopt and steadily pursue the proper measures of acquiring it. It is not to be attained, however, without great labor, and the most persevering industry. Every hour should have its appropriate employment, and every employment its hour. No time can be spared for dissipation or idle amusements. The very moments of necessary relaxation from study and attendance on the sick, should be devoted to pursuits connected with his principal object. The physician should possess a philosophical and inquisitive mind. He should be able to derive instruction from the most common events, and appropriate to his own purpose every hint, which has the remotest connexion with his pursuits. Let him adopt the principle of Dr. Rush, which he used so often to inculcate on his pupils, and learn "to look down as well as up for knowledge." Let him reflect that no person is so ignorant, that he may not teach something even to the wisest man; and that no fact in relation to medicine is so unimportant, that it may not possibly shed at least a gleam of light on some obscure part of physical science.

The physician, who would discharge his duties with satisfaction to himself or benefit to his employers, should cherish an ardent love of his profession.

If, when he first enters the anatomical theatre, and witnesses a demonstration of the wonderful mechanism of the eye and the ear; when the encephalon is lifted from its basis, and he examines the curious arrangement of the nerves; when he contemplates the singular provisions by which the brain is supplied with blood, and the manner in which it is retarded until the design of its reception has been accomplished, he feels no unusual emotions;—if he can behold the sufferings of his fellow men without an irresistible desire to relieve them; or if his sympathies are too weak to prompt him to instantaneous and efficient action; how much time soever he may have wasted, or whatever diplomas he may have received, he is unworthy of the name he has falsely assumed, and can by no means be acknowledged as a genuine disciple of Hippocrates. On the other hand, if his mind is filled with ecstasy, as the various organs of the human body are unfolded to his view; if he reflects on their diversified functions with increasing gratification and delight; if he can feel the sorrows of those who are in affliction, and needs no other stimulus to exertion, than to be informed that his fellow beings are in distress and require his assistance; he possesses the first qualification of a physician; and will early gain the affections and esteem of those, who are so fortunate as to be situated within the sphere of his benevolence.

Another important qualification for successful practice, is a systematical education.

I will not deny, that some men of great diligence, and uncommon powers of mind, have been the instruments of much good to society, independently of this advantage: if so, they have constituted rare exceptions to a rule of very general application: and, so far as my observations have extended, they have in the most pathetic terms lamented

this misfortune of their early lives, on account of the difficulties and uncertainties to which it has constantly subjected them.

It is an ancient maxim, but not on that account, less worthy of regard, that “the man who taught himself physic had a fool for his master.” What shall we say then of those pretended physicians, who deny the necessity of regular preparation, as a qualification for practice; and undertake in a few months to communicate to their pupils all the information which is requisite to fill one of the most important stations in society? The study of anatomy, the very basis on which the column of medical science is supported, cannot possibly be pursued to advantage in private. The number and variety of preparations, both recent and dry, the drawings, models, and imitations, which are necessary to a luminous demonstration of the diversified organs of the human body, must be obtained at an expense far exceeding the means of ordinary practitioners.

In addition to this, it is an absurdity for any individual to attempt to teach all the branches of a medical education. The time and attention requisite to acquire an accurate and profound knowledge of any one department of the healing art, necessarily precludes the possibility of anything more than a general acquaintance with the rest. Hence, the necessity of medical institutions, in which the labors are divided, and the different professors, by devoting their attention to a single department, are enabled to understand it more perfectly, and to teach it more accurately, than would be possible, if their minds were distracted with a great variety of objects.

The establishment of medical schools in our own country has been followed by the most salutary effects, and no doubt thousands of valuable lives are annually preserved in consequence of the more general diffusion of medical information which they have occasioned. We have to lament however that their importance to the com-

munity does not as yet appear to be duly appreciated by the public at large ; yet we trust the time is not far distant, when they will be more liberally endowed, and when many existing prejudices, especially against the prosecution of anatomical inquiries, will be eradicated.

I have heard of a recent instance, in which the inhabitants of a town voted in a public meeting that they would not employ a physician or surgeon who had ever assisted in the dissection of a human body. A mode of procedure, the very reverse of this, would have discovered more enlightened and liberal views. Is the preservation of human life of so little consequence, that it shall be confided to the discretion of men who are ignorant even of the very mechanism which they undertake to rectify ? Is it necessary, that seven years should be employed in acquiring any common trade, and is less time requisite, to obtain a professional, than a mechanical education ? How long will medical coblers retain their place in the public estimation, and as if death were too tardy in its operations, continue to destroy more lives than all the wars which have deluged the world in blood ?

A thorough knowledge of anatomy is an indispensable constituent of a medical education ; and it is to be acquired not by dreaming over a few musty and antiquated books, nor by an occasional glance at an artificial skeleton ; but by diligent and persevering study of the best anatomical authors, and by frequent and careful examinations of the various organs of which the system is composed, not only as presented in a natural state, but as more clearly unfolded on dissection. Distinct and consistent physiological and pathological views, founded on the basis of anatomy, are highly important to the physician ; inasmuch as they afford the only means by which, in examining diseases, he is able to arrive at a certain and accurate diagnosis ; to understand the nature of irregular and disordered action, and

the causes and effects of the several organic lesions. A competent acquaintance with the general principles of chemical science is necessary, not only to explain many of the phenomena of disease, but to direct to a proper preparation and application of remedies. A former professor in this institution, used to relate an anecdote of a physician, who in a certain instance had directed an issue for one of his patients, and on these occasions usually employed the sulphuric acid or caustic potass indifferently: finding on examination that he was not supplied with either article in sufficient quantity, and being a man of expedients, he luckily bethought himself that he could effect his purpose by combining together the small parcels which he possessed of each; and was much perplexed, to account for that peculiarity of skin which so completely resisted the application, that, not only, no pain was experienced, but not the slightest redness, or other sensible effect, could be perceived. It is so important, that every person who undertakes the management of diseases should be correctly instructed in the art, that no physician ought ever to admit a student into his office, without a previous engagement on his part, to attend at least two courses of lectures in some respectable medical institution, and at the close of his pupilage, to present himself for examination and license to some regularly constituted board of censors.

It is for want of information, as well as to magnify their superabundant skill, and, in unsuccessful cases, to shield themselves from merited disgrace and contempt, that some physicians represent their patients as laboring under such extraordinary complications of disease. It is from similar causes that we so often hear of what no man ever saw, two or three fevers in action at the same time in the same individual. Hence simple tumors are magnified into cancers, the profession of medicine is shrouded in impenetrable darkness, and the

treatment of diseases is exceeded in absurdity only by the theories which are framed to explain them.

Having incidentally alluded to the subject of quackery, it may not be wholly foreign to our subject, to enumerate some of the arts by which certain self-styled physicians contrive to obtain reputation and business without the formalities of a preparatory education, such as has been recommended. This they effect, by assuming a magisterial and mystical air on all occasions ; by representing trivial diseases as of a most dangerous and alarming nature ; by giving them false names, especially such as are usually understood to designate complaints which are fatal ; by coining new names on particular emergencies, with an explanatory term denoting the utmost danger ; by denouncing medicines of established efficacy, especially opium and mercury ; by refusing to meet in consultation with physicians of acknowledged skill and reputation, thereby asserting their own superiority ; by a shew of immense business, especially on public days, and on the Sabbath in time of service ; by pretended changes of political or religious sentiments as may best promote their purposes ; and above all by relating, in every company, the histories of diseases they have never seen, and of cures they have never performed. The suppression of quackery in all its forms, whether in the vender of nostrums and patent medicines, or in those who claim to be acknowledged as regular physicians, is “a consummation most devoutly to be wished :” and it can be accomplished most certainly, not indeed by laws denouncing it in penalties which are seldom inflicted, but by diffusing information extensively among all classes of the community, especially the members of our profession ; by the establishment and liberal support of medical schools ; by the formation of societies to promote these specific objects, into which no persons indulging quackish propensities ought ever to find admittance, and from which,

if admitted, they ought, on conviction, to be immediately expelled.

I return from this partial digression to consider some of those qualifications, which are especially important to the physician, not only during the interesting period of his preparatory studies, but after he engages in business. Among these, one of the most essential is indefatigable diligence.

It is worthy of remark, that this qualification, which is within the power of every individual, supplies the place of superior genius, the assistance of friends, the means of visiting foreign countries, and the thousand accidental props, to the want of which, negligence imputes its ill success. The biographer of the late lamented Rush, a name which adds lustre to our national escutcheon,—declares, that during the six years which he spent in preparatory studies, he was absent from his business but two days; and those of you, gentlemen, who were privileged to enjoy his friendship, and hear his instructions, know how faithfully he discharged all his duties, not only to his numerous pupils and patients, but redeemed time to devote his superior talents to the promotion of every benevolent enterprise, and frequently to enliven the social circle, of which he was ever the principal ornament and delight. The temptations to indolence and neglect of study are very strong in the first years of business. Many young men of respectable talents and acquirements commence well; but finding less encouragement than they had anticipated, and perhaps feeling a degree of disgust on noticing the deference which is paid to the opinions of men who are manifestly entitled to no consideration, they at length begin to imagine that all their efforts have been useless, that public favour is so often misplaced, as to render it unworthy of their solicitude; too often they become dissipated in their habits, or should they escape this fatal delusion, they gradually lose their taste for an employment which affords

them so trifling an emolument, and becoming immersed in other cares, seem to forget the high responsibilities which devolve upon them. Before yielding to discouragement, or allowing themselves in practices which will forever destroy their usefulness, let them read the lives of any of the distinguished physicians of former times, and they will find that their reputation commenced with small beginnings ; that they toiled long and arduously, before their characters were known or their merits acknowledged. Let them learn to disregard popular clamor ; let them seek especially the good opinion of the wise and respectable ; let them investigate every disease, however trifling, with the most scrupulous accuracy ; let them pay the strictest attention to every call, however poor or abandoned the applicant ; and let them by all their conduct make it manifest that they feel a real interest in the welfare of their patients ; that they do not exercise their professional duties as a trade, but that their first and principal object is to alleviate distress ; and however they may at first be opposed, neglected, or despised by those who do not wish them to succeed, they will soon be known, and respected ; opposition will gradually cease : a path will open before them : applications for advice will become daily more frequent ; and they will at length obtain the satisfaction of doing much good, and the blessings of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger will be pronounced upon them. For a moment, gentlemen, contrast the character of such a man with that of him, who, too indolent to acquire an accurate knowledge of his profession, avoids all intercourse with men of science, lest his ignorance should be discovered ; and thus depriving himself of one of the most effectual means of obtaining knowledge, seeks the company of the idle and abandoned ; gradually he becomes the inmate of the bar room and the tippling shop :—his practice in all difficult cases must of course be inefficient and unsuccessful ; he soon acquires from his associates

habits of vulgarity and incipient intemperance. Too late he perceives his errors, and, believing it impossible to retrieve them, partakes more freely of the poisonous draught, fatal as that which distils from the Upas tree, and dies the victim of folly and disgrace.

Nearly allied to the qualification last described, and indeed a powerful incentive to its exercise, is sympathy with the sick.

“Sympathy depends upon the state of others, and one of its chief uses is to excite an active interest in favor of the distressed, the mind of the spectators taking on nearly the same action with those of the sufferers, and disposing them to give relief or consolation ; it is therefore one of the first of the social feelings.”* It is this qualification, the twin sister of benevolence, which, more than any other, produces that strong and permanent attachment which unites a physician to his patients ; which conciliates their affections and secures their confidence, and which alone can dispose and prepare him to meet their almost unceasing claims upon his patience and fortitude.

In his intercourse with his patients, the physician should be easy of access, dignified but unassuming in his manners, and not disposed to take offence on trifling provocations. He should be able to sit quietly, and hear the reiterated complaints of those who have been long ill, in connexion with the thousand circumstances of time and place, which are wholly uninteresting to him. Patients, especially with certain nervous complaints, choose to relate their story in their own way, and it gratifies them exceedingly to meet with a physician who is willing to enter into all the minutiae of their cases. It is not prudent in a young physician to offend them ; for as they have generally exhausted the patience of all the practitioners in their neighborhood, they are his first applicants for advice ; and they do not fail to compensate him amply for all his

attention, by extolling his merits, and recommending him to every individual they meet with.

There are other qualifications, which would time permit, it might be proper and interesting on this occasion to describe ; such as a talent of accurate and discriminating observation ; habits of uniform and universal temperance ; decision of character founded on strength and maturity of judgment ; kindness to the poor, and many others, which, like the drapery attached to a finished painting, illustrate the principal figure, and display it to the best advantage ; but, I fear to trespass longer on your patience, and must therefore bring these hasty sketches to a conclusion, after having mentioned one other qualification, which, although last, and perhaps the most uncommon, is by far the most important of any which has been described. It will doubtless be understood, that I refer to a firm and unwavering belief in the truths of divine revelation. By this is intended not a simple assent of the understanding, but an operative principle affecting the heart, and manifesting itself in the life and conduct.

Let the physician, in other respects, be ever so well prepared to discharge the duties of his office, yet if deficient in this, his religious patients will often have occasion to lament with tears of affection, “one thing thou lackest.” His connexions with society are so numerous, his conduct so constantly and minutely inspected, and his influence so extensive, that he needs some higher principle than human philosophy can supply, to enable him faithfully and punctually to fulfil those various obligations which rest upon him. Next to the minister of religion, he has it in his power to promote the spiritual interests of those with whom he is connected more effectually, than any individual in the community. Indeed, in some instances, his opportunities are more favorable than those of the regular attendant on the altar ; for he can penetrate where no clergyman is ever admitted ; he

can select the most eligible moment for conveying instruction, and bears some resemblance to a religious tract, the effect of which, although unseen, is not on that account the less surprising or beneficial. How often is the physician called to witness cases of deep despondency bordering on derangement, arising from improper views of the character of the Deity ; how often does his sympathetic eye penetrate beyond the thin veil of the slight bodily complaints for which he is requested to prescribe, to mental disquietude and harassing fears, which his patient wants confidence to communicate ;—and how delightful on such occasions to assume the office of a Christian friend, to pour balm into his wounds, and to bring before him those consolations, with which the world is unacquainted.

Some of you, gentlemen, have often witnessed the success with which such exertions have been crowned, and have found that they have been productive of effects, which could not have been expected from the administration of any article which the *materia medica* affords.

Not unfrequently, the physician finds himself unsuccessful after his most anxious and well directed efforts, and endures the painful mortification of beholding the disease advance with a sure and steady progress towards a fatal termination. When duty requires him to disclose the truth, and to anticipate the awful result, how consoling to the patient and his friends, if he is able to commend him to that great Physician, whose skill is never baffled, and to direct him to that fountain, whose waters can wash away the deepest infections.

In other instances, his own reputation, which, next to the awards of an approving conscience and the approbation of his final Judge, he values above every other consideration, is furiously attacked by the envenomed tongue of slander : the very catastrophe which he deplores, and which no human skill could have averted, is imputed to

his ignorance or rashness; and he is virtually held up to public abhorrence and detestation, as the cause of the distress which he so sincerely deprecates. Then, if not before, will he realize the necessity of some principle to sustain him under the pressure of his accumulated trials, and to raise him above the smiles or frowns of those, who are wholly incompetent to appreciate the feelings which agitate the inmost recesses of his heart.

In one word, religious principle lies at the foundation of all true excellence in the profession of medicine. It furnishes the physician with the purest motives for the regulation of his conduct; it affords his patients the best pledge that he will be faithful in the discharge of his duties; it produces that calmness and equanimity, which is necessary to enable him to submit with cheerfulness to those various privations to which he is hourly exposed; it occasions resignation and serenity under every trial; and, as he approaches the termination of his labors, it buoys him on the wings of faith and hope, and opens to his delighted prospect all the rewards and enjoyments of the heavenly world.



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